

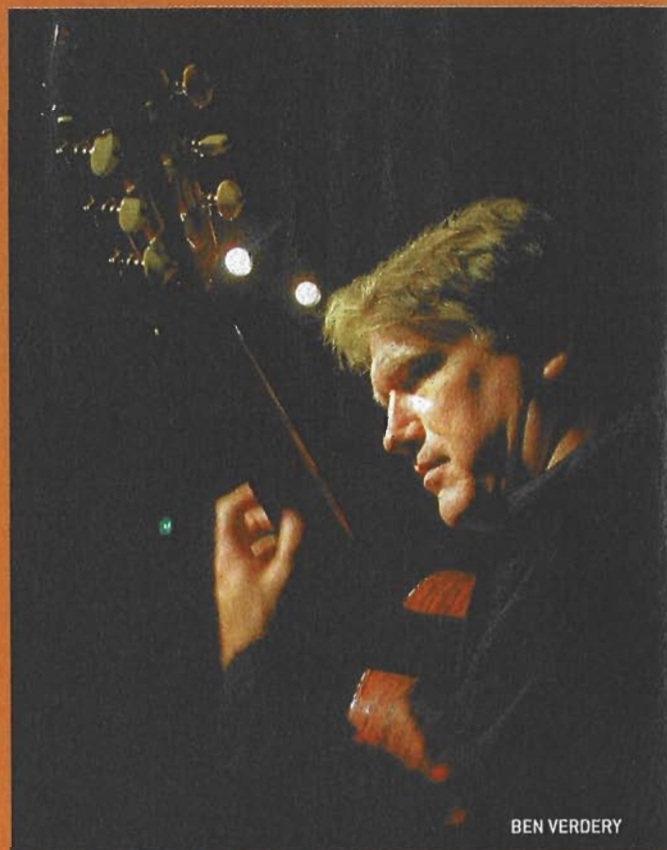
DYNAMIC



ANDY SUMMERS

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ANDY SUMMERS
AND BEN VERDERY
COLLABORATE
ON A CLASSICAL
CONCERTO AND AN
AMBIENT JAMFEST



BEN VERDERY

Some people sing in the shower, and others come up with an idea for an epic guitar collaboration that turns into a Carnegie Hall premiere. This is exactly what occurred to guitarist Ben Verdery—chair of the guitar department at the Yale University School of Music—this past summer. Inspired by working with ex-Police guitarist Andy Summers on the just-finished *First You Build a Cloud* [no label at press time], Verdery decided to approach composer Ingram Marshall about writing a double guitar concerto for electric and acoustic guitar. The Marshall project—entitled *Concerto for Classical and Electric Guitars and*

BY JULIA CROWE



“Ben and I can have a musical conversation about anything.” —Andy Summers

Orchestra—fell into place with astonishing and unexpected speed, and is set to premiere at New York City’s Carnegie Hall on February 23, 2005, with the participation of the American Composers Orchestra and its director Steven Sloan.

“Literally, the whole project came to me in a shower moment,” says Verdery. “I was thinking about some of the tape-delay sounds Andy and I were creating for *First You Build a Cloud*, and I couldn’t help but think of Ingram Marshall, who had worked with me on my album *Soopa*. I called Andy right away, as I was extremely excited by just the *idea* of the project.”

Ingram Marshall—who is often described as a minimalist composer—is best known for his composition *Fog Tropes* (1982), which mixes a Balinese flute with the sounds of the San Francisco Bay. In his piece, *Alcatraz* (1994), he similarly incorporates samples of rippling bay water and slamming prison-cell doors with music that perfectly captures the moods and ambience of the haunted island. There was only one difficulty: Marshall was not entirely familiar with the electric guitar.

“I have written for classical guitar and orchestra, so I was familiar with *that* sound,” explains Marshall. “But the electric

guitar can have that screaming sound.”

And, as it turned out, Marshall was even less familiar with the music of the Police.

“I laughed,” says Summers, “because I thought, ‘Great. A clean slate.’”

Verdery set up a meeting at Summers’ California studio, and invited Marshall to sit in on an informal jam session. “I built a little triangular stage and set up a microphone for a classical guitar,” says Summers. “Then I put up some baffling, and set up the electric rig. Soon after, Ben and I jammed together while Ingram took notes.”

Verdery improvised on classical guitar while Summers experimented with some distorted loops. “It was a lot of fun just listening to them play,” says Marshall. “Some of what they did was new to me, in terms of what the electric guitar can do—its sonority and long, sustained effects. Whenever I referred to any buildups in sonority, Andy would laugh and say, ‘Oh, that’s called Summertronics.’ But just watching them do a scale or chord progression gave me ideas.”

Summers, of course, has prior experience working in orchestral situations. “I played all of the guitar parts in a concert for *Tubular Bells* during the late ’70s, which, ironically, was where I met Sting, who was playing in a support group,” he says. “And I also worked with German composer Eberhard Schoener on a piece where I’d play classical guitar, and then run across the stage to play an electric guitar, before running back across the stage to play classical again.”

But while Summers’ previous sojourns in the orchestral realm have required him to play his electric guitar quietly, and strive to marry its tone with the group, the concerto is designed to give the electric more of a voice.

“I’m not worried about the balance of the guitars with the orchestra,” states Marshall. “Both the electric guitar and the classical guitar will be amplified. An electric guitar has the power to overwhelm an orchestra, and I am giving Andy a moment within the concerto to do just that.”

“I’m approaching the piece in what could be considered a very ambient mindset,” adds Summers. “I’m really relying on the [Lexicon] PCM70 for lots of delay and reverb effects. I want the guitar to have this massive sustain, but I also plan to incorporate loop sequences and other layered textures.”

“What Marshall has written for Andy and I is insanely beautiful,” interjects Verdery. “The music incorporates four different gamelan-type scales, which serve as source material for our improvisations.”

The project that led to the Marshall work—Summers’ and Verdery’s *First You Build a Cloud*—began after the two guitarists

Tucker, bassist for New Jersey’s own Pennyroyals

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struck up a friendship at the New York Guitar Festival in 2002. "I knew of Ben via his fantastic rendition of the *Bach Cello Suite No. 6*, and when we eventually met, we hit it off like a house on fire," says Summers. "I invited him to my house to jam, and I prepared a bunch of harmony loops. I played a Klein guitar—using just reverb as an effect—and I got a very spiritual, icy feel. We jammed for about four hours, and we taped everything. Then, Ben called me when he got home and said, 'Let's make a record!'"

Most of the pieces on *First You Build a Cloud* are improvised, and were recorded in two or three takes. "The sound is very alive," explains Verdery. "It's not about every note being a pearl—it's about two guys playing guitar who have a shared love for music."

"Ben and I can have a musical conversation about *anything*," says Summers, "which really helps us maintain a high degree of sensitivity and empathy when we're improvising. The secret to this communication is that both of us can play many different types and styles of music. We may approach those styles from different directions, but we understand the foundations, so, in the end, we're always reacting to each other within the comfort zone of a shared language." ■

TONE TOOLS

For Ingram Marshall's *Concerto for Classical and Electric Guitars and Orchestra*, Andy Summers played his Gibson ES-335 through a Mesa/Boogie TriAxis. Effects included a Lexicon PCM70, a T.C. Electronic SCF Stereo Chorus, and a Klon Centaur. Ben Verdery used a '95 Greg Smallman & Sons classical stringing with D'Addario Pro Arté EJ45 strings.

Things opened up a bit for the *First You Build a Cloud* sessions, as Verdery often played a Taylor 12-string hammer-dulcimer-style with chopsticks. (For these sections, Verdery preferred the sound and texture of round Thai chopsticks over the square, tapered Japanese variety.) For his more conventional parts, Verdery used his Smallman, a Chris Carrington electric classical (armed with a B-Band pickup system), a Collings OM-2DLX, a '60 Fender solidbody-electric mandolin, and the '63 Fender Stratocaster Summers played on the Police's smash hit "Every Breath You Take." Summers employed the '63 Strat and a '60s-era Esquire, a Gibson ES-335 and an ES-175, and a Klein electric, as well as a Collings nylon-string acoustic, a Dobro, and a ukelele. —JC

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Andy Summers